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Testimony of Dr. Steven J. Adamowski

In Opposition to Raised Bill No. 1160
An Act Concerning School Transportation, The Development of a Model Teacher Performance
Evaluation System, and Teacher Tenure Laws and Cooperative Arrangements

CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Honorable Chairmen and Members of the Committee

My name is Steven J. Adamowski. I currently serve as Superintendent of Hartford Public Schools.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify today in regard to Raised Bill No. 1160, An Act Concerning School Transportation, the Development of a Model Teacher Performance Evaluation System, and Teacher Tenure Laws and Cooperative Arrangements.

Although I must commend the committee in its attempt to ensure that our students are educated by well-trained, highly effective teachers, the measure as drafted does not achieve its intended goal and may, in fact, have the opposite effect.

I speak specifically about Section 2 of the bill which proposes a model evaluation system that would, if approved, be the default evaluation system for the state of Connecticut.

The bill requires training for teachers before implementation and sets guidelines for a remediation plan that must be developed by the evaluator, the teacher and others with the agreement of the local bargaining unit. This remediation plan must include, among other things, a description of reasons for finding a deficiency in a teacher, a plan for improvement, an listing of measures of success, timelines and support; periodic reviews and a time period of up to one year to improve performance **PRIOR** to starting the dismissal process.

In addition, the bill requires cumulative assessments at the end of the remediation period, including recommendations from persons other than the evaluator with the consent of the local bargaining unit. After all of that, a dismissal proceeding that could extend up to 100 days would begin.

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To begin with, the measure extends the evaluation and dismissal process for an inordinately long time by adding many more steps and more time than Hartford's current evaluation tool dictates.

Moreover, the bill requires that management prerogatives about who should evaluate teachers now be given over to the local bargaining units and their designees, all of whom have a legal and conflicting obligation to defend all teachers, regardless of skill, effectiveness or talent.

To pile on a higher and more expensive administrative burden, when so few districts able to take on the already costly task of terminating ineffective tenured teachers is inconsistent with the stated goal of retaining the best possible teachers for our students.

The Report from the Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement lists "excellent teaching" as one of its six recommendations for closing the achievement gap.

Raised Bill 1160, if passed, will actually make it harder to hold ineffective teachers accountable and could in fact ensure that they remain in Connecticut classrooms indefinitely. The 100-day limitation on the dismissal procedure, for example, is meaningless, given that the district is obligated to meet an incredibly high burden of proof to begin with. Add to that the fact that a teacher remains on paid leave during the termination process and you have a built-in incentive to delay the entire course of action as much as possible.

In Hartford, a struggling teacher can be placed on the intensive phase of the evaluation process for only 45 days. The teacher and the evaluator then create a joint remediation plan with performance targets, supports and resources. At the end of 45 days, the teacher can opt for another 45-day cycle. But if the intensive assistance phase is not successful, the teacher is recommended for termination.

Hartford's plan is thorough and challenging, but unlike the proposed guidelines, it does not allow for disagreements to block the process unnecessarily.

Our other objection to the bill appears in Section 4 which adds "failure to successfully complete a remediation plan after notice that performance was deficient" to the list of reasons for termination of a teacher. Current law allows termination for inefficiency or incompetence, insubordination, moral misconduct, disability, elimination of position and sufficient cause. Although the additional provision appears harmless, it wrongly takes the focus off performance and effectiveness and places it on the administrative process.

In closing, I would like to thank the Committee for allowing me to provide testimony objecting to this bill before you today and would be happy to make myself available, should you have any questions.

I ask that you defeat **Raised Bill 1160, *AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION, THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MODEL TEACHER PERFORMANCE EVALUATION SYSTEM, AND TEACHER TENURE LAWS AND COOPERATIVE ARRANGEMENTS.***

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